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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 000601

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/04/2017

TAGS: PREL PHUM PREF KPKO MO

SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: THOUGHTS ON THE USG APPROACH  
TOWARDS AUTONOMY

REF: RABAT 572

Classified by Ambassador Thomas Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

**¶1.** (C) Summary: As we prepare for UN discussion of the renewal of the MINURSO mandate, Embassy Rabat would like to offer several thoughts for consideration on the USG's approach to the very delicate Western Sahara process. The Moroccans have been conducting extensive and far-reaching consultations on their (still evolving) autonomy plan all over the world. Unfortunately, the Moroccans have made no efforts so far to obtain POLISARIO concurrence nor even any genuine outreach to the Sahrawi population. The U.S. could embrace autonomy as a potentially promising basis for a long-term settlement, but we should resolutely avoid endorsing the Moroccan plan per se. We must remain steadfast in our position that any settlement must be the result of direct negotiations among all parties. We are convinced that any unilaterally-imposed solution is doomed to failure, and an approach with which we should not be associated. End summary.

**¶2.** (C) Later this month, the Security Council will consider a new resolution to extend MINURSO's mandate. In the past few months, the Moroccan government has been pursuing an unprecedented diplomatic offensive to build international support for its approach toward autonomy in the Western Sahara and thus break out of a long-standing stalemate. As the USG deliberates its next steps in the rapidly evolving Western Sahara process, Embassy Rabat would like to offer several thoughts for consideration.

**¶3.** (C) In their extensive travels around the world, senior Moroccan delegations have gradually revealed more and more details of their proposal for autonomy in the Western Sahara.

To our knowledge, the Moroccans have not yet offered a complete and comprehensive proposal to anyone. Indeed it appears that the Moroccans have been constantly revising and recalibrating their plans, adjusting to input and feedback provided by their interlocutors in Washington and other key capitals.

**¶4.** (C) The adjustment and amendment of a proposal of such import as a result of consultations is a healthy and encouraging process. What is discouraging, however, is that there is no evidence that the Moroccans have yet held any consultations on their autonomy proposal with POLISARIO or the Sahrawi public. In multiple visits to the territory, and discussions with Sahrawis and local Moroccan officials from all parts of the spectrum, it is clear that there has so far been no meaningful Moroccan effort to obtain Sahrawi "buy-in" to their approach on autonomy.

¶ 5. (C) In this context, we believe the U.S. should avoid making any statements of endorsement for Morocco's Saharan autonomy proposal. The U.S. has long maintained that a solution to the Western Sahara dispute must be the result of a process of negotiation between the parties concerned. This principled position has garnered broad international consensus and has allowed the U.S. to maintain its position as an even handed broker in efforts to reach a settlement.

¶ 6. (C) We strongly believe that a six-month rollover of the MINURSO mandate is essential to maintaining the peace and creating the conditions necessary for a permanent resolution to the conflict. We also believe it appropriate and desirable for the U.S. to publicly welcome Morocco's renewed and vigorous efforts to settle the dispute, and we could note our belief that autonomy for the territory appears to offer a promising potential basis for a permanent solution. We should avoid, however, endorsing Morocco's autonomy proposal per se, and instead continue to press for a solution that is agreed by all parties as the product of a negotiation process.

¶ 7. (C) The relative merits of Morocco's autonomy plan as developed so far are ultimately unimportant. The right autonomy plan is not one that appears good to us, but one that can be negotiated and ultimately accepted and endorsed in some form by all parties. We are convinced that any unilaterally-imposed "solution" will only prompt retrenchment and hostility from the POLISARIO and their Algerian sponsors, and ultimately prove to be a recipe for extending the conflict. In fact, we believe a unilateral approach will not

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only take us back to square one, but risks tainting the concept of autonomy, which we continue to believe offers the best basis for a durable (negotiated) settlement.

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RILEY